Frequently Asked Questions on Competencies and the Use of Data in CTE Administrators
June 11, 2010

Career and Technical Education (CTE) program competencies represent a mechanism for evaluating student performance in content areas. In CTE, each program competency profile document is aligned with national standards which are representative of current practices in business and industry. (e.g., Automotive Mechanics competencies are aligned to NATEF standards, Plumbing competencies are aligned to NAPHCC standards, Agriculture is aligned to National Quality Program Standards for Agriculture Education, etc.) All competencies are also aligned to National Career Clusters Standards and each CTE program is attached to a specific CIP code, to ensure the appropriate competencies are used for a particular program (e.g., Culinary Arts students are scored on Culinary Arts competencies, CIP code is 120500).

Before a program begins the teacher can discuss, review and disperse the program competency profile document to the students. This will assist the students in knowing what is expected in this program and the skills that are expected for perspective employment. To achieve proficiency in a CTE program collaboration between the teacher and the students is needed.

At the start of any CTE program, the teacher and the students should all be aware of the knowledge, content and skills associated with each competency within their program. A desired outcome would be for all students to meet the knowledge, content and skills at proficient level. Teachers can use the knowledge, content and skills statements to guide curriculum development and delivery and monitor student progress. Students can use the same competencies to inform and augment their learning. The use of the program competency profile documents by teachers and students promotes informed learning and helps lead to educational success. Competency documents are available on both the Department of Education's website (http://www.education.nh.gov/career/career/program_compet.htm) and in PerformancePLUS.

Competency guided classrooms are relatively new and there are questions related to the use of competency-based instruction. Additionally, New Hampshire's CTE competencies have served a variety of functions in the past, not all of them feasible or appropriate. This FAQ document is intended to clarify some of the common misconceptions associated with CTE competencies.

Reporting Related Questions

1. How are the competency results used and who uses them?

The results of competencies will be used in a variety of ways, depending on the audience: the Bureau of Career Development, CTE Directors and Principals or teachers.

The Bureau of Career Development at the NH Department of Education
Competency data is required as part of each center's end-of-year (EOY) reporting, and is used for the following;

- Completion of knowledge, content and skills
- Number of program completers
- Number of program concentrators
- Overall student progress and competency attainment throughout the duration of a program; and
- To inform discussions relating to program improvement and data that may prompt questions/concerns (i.e., unusually high levels of proficiency, such as 100% of student achieving Mastery in all competencies; consistently low proficiency scores for all students in a particular content area; etc.)
- To determine when it is time to update the competencies to meet national standards (currently on a four year basis but release of national standards may alter this schedule)

CTE Directors/Principals
Administrators can use the data reported in the competencies in a variety of ways:

- Identification of student progress in various programs throughout the year
- As an indicator of program quality (combined with other factors or indicators)
- Teacher evaluation
- Teacher support
- Identification of professional development needs

Teachers
Teachers can use the data related to their competencies in similar ways as the administrator:

- Tracking student progress
- Identification of student participation throughout the year
- Identifying areas in the curriculum that may need additional resources or support
- The state-wide competencies represent core standards and do not reflect all that will be taught or can be learned, therefore the teacher may add either program or district wide competencies. Note: In the event additional competencies are added; this would be done at the local level and would not alter the State competency document. These additional competencies are not reported to the State.
- Student test-out if mastery level is achieved.
  Note: This would represent a local policy decision.
- Inform administrators about needed training, software and equipment needs especially around budget time
- Identification of skill requirements and their attainment to validate program content when making connections to postsecondary and business and industry
- Can assist in the development of dual credit and articulation agreements with postsecondary

2. From an administrator's perspective, how can competencies be used as an indicator of program quality?

Identification of student progress in various programs throughout the year

- Are students progressing along a reasonable timeline?
- Is there a correlation between the number of participants and the number of concentrators?
- Is there a correlation between the number of concentrators and the number of completers?
- What does the data reveal about proficiency levels?
- Identification of student deficiencies in academic areas

3. What are other indicators of program quality?

Program quality can be measured through a variety of indicators, competency results among them. Other indicators include; enrollment and enrollment trends; postsecondary placement (college and/or work); advisory board activity; student certifications; program certifications; activity targeted toward on program improvement; in-house marketing; and bi-annual review of occupational needs in relation to program offerings. The Association of Career and Technical Education (ACTE) published an article titled "The PSI Score Card: Determining When to Close a CTE Program" that outlines suggestions for the annual evaluation of a program, which can be read online or downloaded in PDF format from the ACTE website (http://www.acteonline.org/tech_sep09.aspx).

4. The State requires end of year reporting only. Why should I require additional reporting from my teachers?

Requiring periodic updates of competency scores allows teachers to use the competencies as a dynamic tool to aid instruction. Competencies are meant to inform and guide curriculum as well as inform and motivate students to take responsibility for their own learning. These outcomes are best accomplished through periodic updates to competency scores, which, are communicated to students throughout the year.

5. Are there strategies that teachers can employ to better utilize the competency documents in class?

The competencies are aligned with national standards to reflect current practices in business and industry. Teachers can use the competencies to ensure that curriculum and lesson plans are designed to facilitate student success in the program and prepare students to pursue further involvement in the field after high school.

Teachers can share the competency document with their students from their first day in the program, and explain how the document outlines the knowledge and skills the students will be expected to learn over the full duration of the program. Teachers who have utilized the competencies in this matter have reported great success, with students who are more engaged in class and committed to achieving positive outcomes.

Periodically students and teachers can meet to discuss student progress using the competency document to guide the discussion. Teachers may also have their students use the competency document as a self-assessment prior to these meetings so that the student and instructor can discuss progress and strategies for improvement or maintenance of a skill in a collaborative manner.

6. Please provide clarification on the definition of a completer?

A completer is a student that has attained 90% of the competencies at a level of proficient or better. A competency score of 3 is considered proficient, a score of 4 is considered proficient with distinction.

7. What is the difference between proficient and proficient with distinction?

PROFICIENT:
The student is comfortable with the material and can demonstrate his or her knowledge and skills without supervision.

PROFICIENT WITH DISTINCTION (MASTERY):
The student has mastered the material and is able to demonstrate his or her knowledge and skills without supervision and be able to transfer that skill to other areas.

Determination of proficiency and proficiency with distinction are determined at the local level.

8. Are competency reports required for all students: participants, concentrators and completers?

Data is required for concentrators and completers only.

9. How is the competency document scored?

The knowledge, content and skills statements, in column two, are scored/evaluated individually. The competency found in column one is not scored.

10. What happens if a teacher does not cover one or two of the knowledge, content and skills in a competency?

The teacher enters a score of "1", which indicates "no exposure" for the knowledge, content and skill items that are not covered until a later installment of the program. For example, in a two-year Culinary Arts course, students are not expected to cover all Culinary Arts competencies in the first year.

11. Refresh my memory, what is the difference between a participant and a concentrator?

A participant is a secondary student enrolled in an approved career and technical education program area.

A concentrator is a student who is enrolled in the second half of an approved career and technical education program.

12. In reference to concentrators, how would a school determine the point at which a career and technical education program has entered the second half?

Prior to the implementation of competency-based learning, the first and second half of a CTE program were determined by seat time. 540 hours of CTE instruction were required to become a program completer, so once a student had surpassed 270 hours of that instruction the student could be considered a concentrator.

Seat time is no longer used to determine concentrator and completer status in career and technical education programs. Under a competency-based system, what constitutes the first and second half of a CTE program is determined by the local school district. There are several methods that may be employed to make this determination. One method would be to "map" a program's course offerings so that competency attainment determines which students are concentrators. In a program with ten competencies, for example, a student what achieved proficiency in five of those competencies and is still enrolled in the program would be considered a concentrator.

13. This seems like a lot of work for the teachers. Can this be done at the State level?

Every CTE center delivers their curriculum differently, even for programs in the same content area, so it would not be feasible or equitable for the State to dictate this type of information.

14. Is there a mechanism in PerformancePLUS (P+) or CATE that would be marked when a student is to be considered a concentrator?

CTE centers are required to report which students are concentrators and completers as part of their end-of-year (EOY) reporting. This information is uploaded into CATE via the CATE/i4See workbench. This information is communicated to PerformancePLUS and can be used to filter reports, form focus groups, etc in the P+ system. As indicated above, since each center may have a different method for determining concentrator status it would be impossible to program CATE or P+ to automatically make that determination.

Currently centers are also required to report "Total Competencies Completed" for any student identified as a "Concentrator" on the center's CATE_Student_Course submission (element 1755, https://ww4.ed.state.nh.us/datadictionary/ElementDetail.aspx?ID+1755). A future enhancement to the CTE data system is expected to bridge P+ back to CATE and communicate the number of competencies a student has completed at proficient or better, thereby alleviating the centers of having to duplicate their work.

Funding Related Questions

15. Are program completion rates linked to program funding?

The state does not link program completion or the number of program completers to any federal funding.

Federal funds are formula-driven based on US Census data and the annual rate of poverty by state and town. Perkins allocations have nothing to do with program-level data.

16. I was under the impression that past information suggested a direct correlation between program completers and program funding. Does this represent new information?

No. Distribution of Perkins funding is now and has always been driven by federal legislation. The formula-based allocation of funds is part of the Perkins legislation (Section 131).

17. If completer information cannot be used at the State level to determine program funding, is it acceptable to use such information as an indicator at the local level?

Allocations from the State to the centers are governed by federal law. The Perkins legislation also details specific requirements and permissible uses of those funds at the local level (Section 135). Each center can decide how to use its local allocation to support the goals of the center’s five year CTE strategic plan. Distribution of local Perkins funding is a school-level determination based on specific local criteria. Proficiency in CTE competencies may be one of many factors the school considers during that decision-making process.

In summation, State allocations to CTE centers are formula-based and defined by federal law. Qualitative criteria such as enrollment, program completion, etc do not affect the formula-based allocation process. Local distribution of Perkins funding is a school-level decision and may be based on a variety of conditions, including but not limited to qualitative criteria.

18. I understand that completers are not used to determine Perkins allocations but the number of completers would be important for federal reporting, correct?

As part of federal reporting, the State is required to provide data relating to specific secondary and postsecondary performance indicators (PI’s) of the eight secondary-level PI’s only one – “Nontraditional Completion” – requires the reporting of program completers; specifically students who have completed a program considered nontraditional for their gender.

Other secondary PI's focus primarily on senior concentrators who can be "followed" into postsecondary realms of higher education, military service, or employment.

19. Speaking of PI's; if a center falls below their goal on any PI, will this affect center funding?

No. The money that is allocated is the money that is received.

In the event that goals are not met, centers must submit a targeted improvement plan to their liaison at the Career Development Bureau. If a center continues to have difficulty reaching goals the Career Development Bureau may direct the area in which you must spend a portion of the funds.

20. If I have questions that are not addressed in this FAQ, who is the best person to contact?

Feel free to contact any or all of the following via email:

Your center liaison, Lisa Danley (lisa.danley@ed.state.nh.us) or Melissa Ritchings (melissa.ritchings@ed.state.nh.us)